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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
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INFO RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA 5641
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA 8034
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE 9305
RUEHKS/AMCONSUL SAPPORO 6246

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 000169

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DEPT. PLEASE PASS TO USTR/BEEMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/22/2017

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SUBJECT: POLLS SHOW FUKUDA SUPPORT TRENDING DOWN

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Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

Summary and Comment

11. (C) Opinion polls conducted over the January 12-13 weekend underscore that Prime Minister Fukuda's support rate continues on a downward trend. Each of Japan's dailies reflects a particular political bias and often the papers produce polling results that closely mirror their readership base. In addition, question phraseology and other polling methodology, such as polling over the telephone versus face-to-face, may affect the outcomes of the surveys. That said, the trends across the board are similar, and most, if not all, polls now show non-support ratings for the Cabinet outpacing support rates.

12. (C) Despite PM Fukuda's trip to China, his legislative solution to the Hepatitis C problem, and passage of the OEF refueling bill, his standing with the public received no measurable boost. The Japanese electorate's focus remains on bread-and-butter issues such as the pension debacle, not on the contentious OEF law passed on January 11. Support for the two main parties is fairly constant with the DPJ not benefiting from the Cabinet's sagging popularity, although poll respondents indicated an election should be held before the end of 2008. Support for Japan's Self Defense Forces returning to the Indian Ocean remains divided but fairly steady.

Polls Show Mostly Lower Support for Fukuda

13. (SBU) A majority of opinion polls taken over the weekend of January 12-13 showed nonsupport for Prime Minister Fukuda exceeding his support. Three of Japan's dailies (Yomiuri Shimbun, Asahi Shimbun, and Tokyo Shimbun), the business newspaper Nikkei Shimbun, and four television stations conducted surveys. Only Yomiuri and TV-Asahi reflected marginally higher support than non-support for the Fukuda cabinet. Numbers in parentheses are from last month's polls.

	Support	Non-support	Diff.
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Newspapers			

Yomiuri	45.6 (52.5)	41.6 (35.3)	4 (17.2)
Asahi	34 (31)	45 (48)	-9 (-17)
Nikkei	42 (43)	46 (46)	-4 (-3)

Tokyo 41.4 (35.3) 42.8 (47.6) -1.4 (-12.3)

TV Stations

NTV	41.2	50.5	-9.3
TV-Asahi	40.3	39.5	0.8
TBS-TV	44.9	53.8	-8.9
FNN	36.6 (41.1)	47.3 (40.3)	-10.7 (0.8)

Support for LDP and DPJ Fairly Constant

14. (C) The newspapers also asked about support for the two main parties, the ruling Liberal Democratic party (LDP) and the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). The more liberal Asahi's poll reflects stronger support for the DPJ, while the other newspapers indicate that support for the LDP is still greater. Some of this fluidity can be explained by the large pool of unaffiliated voters who may be swayed temporarily by one party or the other on a particular issue, but then later drop back to unaffiliated status. The polls reflect little change on a month-to-month basis, meaning Fukuda got no boost in support from his trip to China or for resolving the Hepatitis C issue. At the same time, Fukuda also did not suffer from using the two-third's majority vote in the Lower House to pass the Anti-Terror Special Measures Law, and neither did the DPJ gain. The percentage in each poll attributed to unaffiliated voters may very greatly affected the baseline support members for the parties themselves.

	LDP	DPJ	Diff.
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Yomiuri	34.7 (35.3)	22.2 (17.1)	12.5
Asahi	25 (23)	36 (38)	-9
Nikkei	36 (38)	30 (34)	6
Tokyo	32 (25.2)	27 (28.5)	5

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Election Timing

15. (SBU) On the subject of the timing for the next general election, the responses indicated greater support for an election before 2009.

	Yomiuri	Tokyo	FNN
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ASAP	19.6		
First half 2008	9.3	22.9	23.6
Second half 2008	22.2	29.6	45.9
Within 2008	18		
Before 9/2009	22.2	8.4	
9/2009	31.8	29	

16. (SBU) The ruling coalition used its two-third's majority in the Lower House to pass the Anti-Terror Special Measures Law, which allows the MSDF to return to the Indian Ocean. Asked to comment on the first use of this constitutional provision in 50 years, the respondents were divided.

	Support	Non-sup	Diff.
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Yomiuri	41.4	45.7	-4.3
Asahi	41	41	0
Nikkei	43	38	5
Tokyo Shimbun	41.6	46.7	-5.1
TBS-TV	39	52	-11
Fuji-TV	39.4	48.4	-9

17. (SBU) Yomiuri, Asahi and Sankei/FNN asked respondents about the pension record-keeping issue and whether they approve of how the administration handled it. Political biases as well as different polling methodologies appear to be reflected in the results. Polls also show that while

support for the override vote on the anti-terror law outweighed disapproval, a similar question about using such a tactic regularly with other bills, such as during the ongoing regular Diet session, was frowned on by the public.

	Support	Non-sup	Diff.
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Yomiuri	54.8	40.5	14.3
Asahi	26	55	-29
Sankei/FNN	28 (31.2)	64 (53.9)	-36

Limits to Polling Methodology

18. (C) Yomiuri Shimbun, a conservative daily, conducted a face-to-face poll, while the Asahi Shimbun, the liberal, populist Tokyo Shimbun and the Nikkei business newspaper used the random digit dialing (RDD) method. Polling experts consider face-to-face polling to be the more accurate of the two methods because they believe that people are more honest when asked face-to-face than when asked over the phone. In addition, the RDD method only pegs people who are at home on the weekend. Cell phones are not included in the sampling, which means that an enormous part of Japan's younger generation is not being polled. The effective return figure for face-to-face polling may be 10 or more percentage points higher than the effective return figure for the telephone sampling method.

SCHIEFFER